

Terrorist incidents etched in MTMC HQ memory

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The tragedies of the Sept. 11 terrorist plane crashes leapt into the lives of MTMC Headquarters employees.

One second, it was a perfect fall day. The next, a national tragedy instantly unfolded to an international office.

Neither we nor the nation will ever be the same.

One of the first to hear the news was Capt. Ion Thomas who heard a reference to a plane crash at the World Trade Center as he passed a television monitor. The Commanding General's Aide came over to the Command Affairs Office and a television was immediately turned ... to an increasingly stunned audience.

Then, horror.

A second plane struck the second tower.

Frank Galluzzo, stared in total disbelief. A veteran of MTMC's old ocean terminal in Bayonne, N.J., Galluzzo takes pride in being a Greater New Yorker ... now, he shook his head slowly in disbelief.

It seemed only moments later – and the terror continued ... on our back door. The Command Affairs Office is on the 11th floor of the Hoffman II building. It faces north – directly toward Washington.

Our only warning of the Pentagon terrorist crash was a distinct “KA-BOOM.” My window showed blue sky. Command Historian Mike Bellafaire hastened to say “There's smoke!”

Could it be continuing?

Impossible.

Yet, the smoke arched higher and higher in the clear sky. Moments later, our worst fears were realized.

The Pentagon had been struck on the west side by the heliport. We could watch the catastrophe in New York City on the television and in the immediate window was a thickening and broadening pillar of smoke funneling into the air from the Pentagon.

Soon, word came that liberal leave was declared. In short order, the word came to evacuate.

With federal offices emptying all over the city, by 1 p.m. the phone calls and e-mail messages had all but halted.

Work resumed the next day but – it was in a changed America.

Now, as days of work pass, the memory dulls but is not gone ...

Resource management specialist Yolanda Bailey takes a break Sept. 13 on the sidewalk outside MTMC Headquarters.

On this day, her normal smile is missing.

“This is a horrible experience,” said Bailey.

She knows Pentagon workers who remain unaccounted for in the Pentagon.

Directly in the path of the aircraft was Resource Services Washington Operating Agency 22, known by its acronym OA22.

The office was destroyed in the crash – the bulk of the personnel unaccounted for two days after the crash.

“I know these people,” said Bailey, “I worked with these people every day. I socialized with them.”

There is pain. Her only therapy is plunging in her work but the pain remains ...

Pam Branstetter, of the Staff Judge Advocate’s Office stops by. Like most MTMC Headquarters employees these days – she has a story to tell.

“My husband actually saw the plane crash into the Pentagon,” said the administrative officer. “He works at the Navy Annex and the plane was flying so low he thought it was going to hit his building.

Her husband of 29 years, Ross Branstetter, watched the next split seconds in horror, she said.

“He said it was like a movie,” said Branstetter. “He saw the plane disappear and then there was a fireball. He was pretty shaken.”

Former MTMC employee Sedi Graham, a friend of Branstetter’s was within 100 feet of the plane’s impact.

“She felt the air compression of the blast – she saw fire in the corridor,” said Branstetter. “She started running.”

Graham used to work in MTMC’s old facilities engineering.

And, so on. Every employee here has a story or many stories ... They have their own story and also that of friends, relatives, coworkers or neighbors ...

Time will pass.

But, we will not forget.